DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 331 037 CS 010 557

AUTHOR Strickland, Kathleen M.
TITLE Changes in Perspectives: Student Teachers' Development of a Reading Instruction Philosophy.
PUB DATE Feb 90
NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meting of the Association of Teacher Educators (Las Vegas, NV, February 5-8, 1990).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Philosophy; Educational Research; Elementary Education; Higher Education; *Reading Instruction; Reading Teachers; *Student Teacher Attitudes; *Student Teachers; *Teaching Methods; Undergraduate Students; Whole Language Approach
IDENTIFIERS *Theoretical Orientation

ABSTRACT

A study compared the philosophies developed in undergraduate methods courses with philosophies influenced by example under a cooperating teacher in an elementary school classroom. Subjects for the first part of the study were 14 undergraduate students enrolled in a methods course. The subjects for the second part of the study were 12 students who had recently completed the same methods course and were participating in their field experience at a suburban public school three days a week for five weeks. Data were collected through administration of the Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile (TORP) at the beginning and end of the semester, several reaction papers written by students, and observations and conversations with the cooperating teachers. Results indicated that students were influenced by the philosophies of their university professors, and many were open to new ideas and philosophies. As indicated in the second half of the study, however, many students left methods courses with no orientation or philosophy. The amount of influence cooperating teachers had on students varied. Although the influence on behaviors or methods of classroom management was evident during observation, very few students were influenced philosophically by what they saw happening in the classroom. Students with a whole language philosophy used terms such as "believe" and "know" when discussing what they were doing in the classroom, indicating that they had an understanding of the reasons behind the way they were approaching literacy. (Three tables of data are included.) (MG)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED331037

# CHANGES IN PERSPECTIVES: STUDENT TEACHERS' DEVELOPMENT OF A READING INSTRUCTION PHILOSOPHY

Kathleen M. Strickland

Slippery Rock University

A Paper Presented at

Association of Teacher Educators

February, 1990.

Las Vegas, NV

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CS010557

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Kathleen Strickland

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

## The Problem and Its Significance

For the last 25 years, reading research has proven to educators that reading is a process and that it is learned from whole to part. Based on this knowledge, many reading method courses taught to prospective teachers emphasize this concept and employ the philosophies of such experts as Ken Goodman (1986), Frank Smith (1988), and Constance Weaver (1988).

As the NCTE Commission on Reading points out, however, when these students enter the field for the first time as classroom participants or as student teachers, in over 90% of all elementary classrooms, they are confronted with basal reading programs employing a phonics-based, controlled vocabulary, management approach to reading. The classroom teacher very often says little about the approach or philosophy that is used in this classroom but emphasizes the mechanics of the program and how reading groups are managed; prospective teachers are then faced with the problem of developing their own philosophy of reading--based either on what they have learned "theoretically" in the college classroom or what they have seen used in the "real" elementary school classroom on a daily basis.

Review of Research

The influence of instruction on learning to read is widely reported in the literature (Barr, 1972; Chall, 1967; Dunkin & Biddle, 1974; Elder, 1971; Mitchell, 1980; Ramsey, 1962). This research points out that teachers are "decision makers who process information and act upon these decisions within complex environments" (DeFord, 1985, p. 352). Harste and Burke (1977) found that the decisions teachers make about reading and learning and their theories that arise from those decisions, are what they use to establish the goals, procedures, and materials they use in their classrooms.

Researchers who have examined the relationship between the theories teachers hold about reading instruction and their classroom practice have reported mixed results (DeFord, 1981; Harste and Burke, 1977; Kamil & Peterson, 1979; Mitchell, 1980). Smith (1988) argues that knowledge forms a system of beliefs which influences behavior. Smith says, "what we have in our heads is a theory of what the world is like, a theory that is the basis of all our perceptions and understandings of the world, the root of all learning, the source of all hopes and fears, motives and expectancies, reasoning and creativity. And this theory is all we have. If we can make sense of the world at all, it is by interpreting our interactions with the world in light of our theory" (p. 7).

Harste and Burke (1977) define this theoretical orientation in reading as the belief about reading that forms

philosophical principles that will guide teachers to establish expectations about students behaviors and all the decisions they make as they teach reading in their classrooms. Harste and Burke also suggest that the following are influenced by a teacher's theoretical orientation:

1. The goals that teachers set for their classroom reading program
2. The behaviors teachers perceive as reflecting "good" reading behavior
3. The procedures, materials, and information teachers use for instructional diagnosis
4. The weighting teachers give to various pieces of diagnostic information
5. The materials teachers select and use for instruction in the program
6. The environment teachers perceive to be most conducive to reading growth
7. The criteria teachers use to determine growth in reading.

In light of this research, it is important that we help prospective teachers develop a theoretical philosophy that will support what we know about how children acquire literacy. This study will compare the philosophies developed in undergraduate methods courses with philosophies influenced by example during those first weeks of guidance under a cooperating teacher in an elementary school classroom. Because these philosophies are often conflicting, and the students beliefs and understandings are only in their beginning stages, are we adequately preparing new teachers to

enter their classrooms confident about what reading is and how it should be taught?

## Design of the Study and Collection of Data

The subjects for the first part of this study were 14 undergraduate students enrolled in "Methods and Materials for Teaching Elementary Reading" in the Curriculum and Instruction Department at a public four-year university in Pennsylvania. The subjects for this part were all enrolled in the same section, taught by the same instructor. The subjects for the second part of the study were twelve students from the same university who had recently completed their "Methods and Materials" course and were participating in their field experience at a suburban public school three days a week for five weeks. The subjects for this part were enrolled in different sections of the same course, taught by different instructors.

During the first week of the "Methods and Materials" course, all students were given the DeFord Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile, subsequently referred to as the TORP. A validated instrument (DeFord, 1985), the TORP determines a subject's theoretical orientation to reading instruction and uses a Likert scale response system to determine a subject's beliefs about practices in reading instruction. This will show if the subject's orientation toward reading instruction is whole language, phonics, or skills, or a combination of the above.

Following this, the students wrote four or five reaction

papers during the ten weeks responding to the question, "How do you feel about what you have learned up to this point in this 'Methods' course? Include your reaction to theories presented and work required. Include also your personal experiences." The subjects of both the TORP and the reaction papers were identified only by the last four digits of the students' phone numbers. At the end of the semester the students were retested using the TORP and the instrument was also administered to the instructor of the "Methods and Materials" course, who used, professed, and practiced a whole language approach to teaching literacy.

An item analysis was conducted on both administrations of the TORP to determine whether the students had a whole language, phonics, or skills philosophy. The TORP consists of 36 statements about reading and reading instruction with a five degree Likert scale response sysstem ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Items 5, 7, 15, 17, 18, 23, 26, and 27 are the eight items representing whole language orientation. The skills items are 4, 8, 11, 13, 14, 16, 19, 24, 25, and 28. The phonics items are 1, 2, 3, 6, 9, 10, 12, 20, 21, 22.

---

Figure 1 about here

---

To determine which orientation was held by each subject, an item analysis was completed. (See Figure 1) If the student agreed with a certain orientation, the responses would favor

numbers 1 or 2 in that particular sequence. If the sequence showed a majority of numbers 4 or 5, this would indicate strong disagreement as well as the rejection by strong disagreement with those other two orientations. A subject with no clear philosophy would be one whose scores revealed neither clear agreement nor disagreement. Pre/post results of both TORP tests were compared for each subject to yield a quantitative measure. Changes in each subject's philosophy of reading and reading instruction, as stated in their periodic reaction papers, were compared to yield a quantitative measure.

As the semester progressed one student reported that "basals control the teacher;" there was "no real way to teach phonics;" and that she agreed with Smith's article on programmed learning.

Another student reported that she had always thought "you had to sound out words and memorize them." Then, midway through the semester, she felt "in harmony" with what she learned. "Things just fell into place," and she realized she had developed a philosophy toward teaching reading.

One student wrote that he always thought teaching reading would be the way he learned it: part to whole. Later, he questioned what made one method "better" than another. Near the end of the course he reported that he could distinguish between approaches and he now understood his philosophy.

An interesting observation was from a student who reported that she did not have a philosophy yet, but though she believed in whole to part theory. She stated that she was

waiting to teach to see what "works," emphasizing the common wisdom concerning the importance of the field experience.

For the second part of the study, the TORP was administered to 12 students at the culmination of their "Methods" course, the week before their field experience. When answering this test, the subjects put their names on the paper because, as they did not take a course from their supervisor and were unaware of her reading philosophy and orientation, their responses would not be influenced by the Hawthorne effect. While the students are in the field experience, the TORP was given to their cooperating teachers and the students again took the TORP at the end of their experience. The students also wrote a reaction paper comparing what they learned in their "Methods" courses with what they learned in the field, providing a qualitative measure for the second part of the study. Observation of classroom practices and procedures, as well as conversation with both the students and cooperating teachers, also provided qualitative information and measures.

The pre/post results of the TORP were analyzed to determine the philosophy of the 12 students at the beginning of the field experience as compared with their philosophy at the end. This final philosophy was compared to their cooperating teacher's orientation and philosophy of reading and reading instruction, as determined by the TORP. As suggested by DeFord (1985) in the validation of the TORP, other data was considered in this study when determining a subject's orientation and philosophy: response papers, interviews, and observations.

## Results

### Part One

The results of the first part of this study show that at the beginning of the "Methods" course the students had either a skills/phonics philosophy of reading or no definite philosophy at all. Based on what they reported in their reaction papers, most of them had been taught to read, or instructed in their own elementary school experience, using a part-to-whole method. A logical assumption would be that their philosophies of teaching reading were probably based on what they had experienced as students in school.

As the semester progressed, responses in the reaction papers expressed an overall move toward a whole language philosophy. It should be noted however that, although the responses were anonymous, the students were aware that these responses were being read by their "Methods" teacher who had a strong whole language orientation, as evidenced both by the TORP profile and the content and methodology of the course. However, students were given the final administration of the TORP only after grades had been completed and identified only by their four-digit numbers. The results of the TORP at the end of the "Methods" course revealed a change, not only in the student's philosophy toward reading instruction, but also in their thinking processes. Many students, instead of just circling the numbers on the Likert scale response questionnaire, actually clarified their answers by writing comments next to the statement. In doing this, they were

illustrating that the question was a complex one that they felt could not be answered generally and they felt a need to qualify their response, which shows the TORP was inadequate to express their philosophies. Because such thinking was not exhibited in the first administration of the TORP at the beginning of the semester, it would seem to indicate that the students were thinking and questioning at this point in order to develop a philosophy or an orientation toward reading instruction. The results of the TORP for this group are shown in Table 1.

---

Table 1 about here

---

Based on these results, at the beginning of the semester in January, 50% of the students had no definite philosophy, 43% showed a skills/phonics approach, 7% a phonics approach, and 0% a whole language or whole language/skills approach. At the completion of the "Methods" course in March, 7% had no defined philosophy, 0% showed a skills/phonics or phonics approach, 43% showed a whole language/skills approach and 50% showed a whole language orientation. This combination of approaches--whole language/skills and phonics/skills--is understandable in light of the study done by DeFord (1985) which showed an overlap in instructional programs in the teaching of reading, "particularly in areas of proximity to another orientation" (p. 354). (See Table 2) This shows that phonics and skills orientations tended to share practices, as

did the skills and whole langauge orientation, but there was little sharing between phonics and whole language.

---

Table 2 about here

---

Part Two

The examination of the field students produced inconclusive results. Like the methods students, most entered the experience with no concrete philosophy, even though all had completed a reading methods course. (All these courses are taught by professors or instructors who approach the course differently with their own philosophies, or absence of philosophies.)

The results of the TORP for this group are shown in Table 3.

---

Table 3 about here

---

By the end of the experience, only one student exhibited a change in philosophy as compared to all students in the methods course group. Based on the TORP, 58% of the students had no definite philosophy at the beginning of the experience; 50% had no definite philosophy at the end of the experience; and, 41% of the cooperating teachers showed no definite philosophy on the TORP. Through observation, it was

noted that these teachers followed the program required by the school district, which was a basal reading series by Ginn Publishers. All instruction in reading followed the teacher's manual with heavy emphasis on skill and drills through the student's "skillpacks."

In this same group of field students, 17% exhibited a skills/phonics perspective in March; the same 17% retained this philosophy in May; and, 33% of the cooperating teachers showed this philosophy, including the teachers of the 17% in the student group. Although no students exhibited a whole language/skills philosophy in March, one student, (8%) showed such an orientation in May, although no teachers exhibited this philosophy. Finally, according to the TORP, 25% of the students entered the experience with whole language orientations, and the same 25% retained this philosophy at the end of the experience, even though their cooperating teachers reported either a skills/phonics approach, or no definite orientation.

## Conclusions and Implications

Although this study was limited in the number of subjects, and the time span over which they were observed, I feel I can draw some conclusions based on the results.

First, students are definitely influenced by the philosophies of their university professors, especially when that professor is very adament about his/her beliefs and encourages study and discussion of current research in the field of literacy acquisition. Although students enter the

class basing their beliefs on what they experienced as students in school, many are open to new ideas and philosophies.

However, as was indicated in the second half of this study, many students leave methods courses with no orientation or philosophy. Perhaps the emphasis of these courses is on materials and strategies rather than on philosophies.

During the field experience, the amount of influence the cooperating teacher had on the field student varied. Although the influence on behaviors or methods of classroom management were evident during observation, very few students were influenced philosophically by what they saw happening in the area of reading in the classroom. I surmise that this was due to the lack of any concrete orientation toward reading on the part of their cooperating teacher. Those teachers who had a definite skills/phonics philosophy followed the orientation of the prescribed program, and those who had a whole language philosophy apologized but still followed the district program for political reasons. Supporting this interpretation, James Moffett (1985) says that teachers try to rationalize and do not think deeply about what they feel they have no power over. The attitude of the teachers is one that says, "Perhaps researchers are right, but I cannot do those things in my school." Consequently, a student assigned to such a teacher's classroom left the experience with no philosophy still, due in part to the mixed message of the classroom teacher.

It was interesting to note that the students who entered their field experience with a whole language philosophy

retained that philosophy even though their cooperating teachers had a skills/phonics or no concrete orientation. One possible interpretation would be that these students entered the teaching experience with a philosophy, a belief in a particular theory of how literacy is acquired, rather than a knowledge of a program or a method. This enabled them to view programs they saw in the school critically and support why they felt it was successful or not. As one student reported in an interview, "My cooperating teacher is very nice, and I've learned a lot about organization from her, but I know I'd use a different approach to reading in my classroom." This same student taught reading and writing with a whole language approach in the confines of a very bottom-up program, even though this method was frowned upon by her cooperating teacher, who saw her work with groups as a "lack of control." This student reported that she "had" to teach this way because she <u>believed</u> it was the way children learned.

It was interesting to observe that during interviews the students with a whole language philosophy used terms such as "believe" and "know" to explain <u>why</u> they were doing what they were doing in the classroom. They had an understanding of the reasons behind the way they were approaching literacy; they had a concrete philosophy.

This brief study has some important implications for university instructors who are training students in the teaching of reading. First, students must understand how one learns to read and what reading is. They must be encouraged to think and discover literacy acquisition through the reading of current research. They should be exposed to different

philosophies and be encouraged to form their own philosophy based on how children learn. What most elementary education teacher training programs stress is methods and materials. How can a prospective teacher understand how to teach, if they do not understand how children learn? With the absence of philosophy comes a dependence on "methods" or prescribed programs. As one student in this study who had no defined orientation reported, she felt she needed more instruction in writing "skills" lessons and methods for teaching grammar and constructing bulletin boards. This was important to her because her absence of any understanding of how learning occurs necessitated a defined "program" for her classroom so she could feel secure.

Also, along with how methods courses are taught comes the responsibility of the university to follow through with field placements that are carefully selected. The students at this stage should be able to practice their philosophies of reading in an atmosphere that is conducive to the development of their learning. Along with this should be weekly seminars in which students and supervisors meet as a group and discuss what they have observed and experienced. The supervisor should be the one who taught the methods course the students participated in or the one who shares the same philosophy toward literacy. Only in this way will prospective teachers be encouraged and supported in their desire to practice what they have learned.

This study also has implications for teachers and administrators. A great deal of research has been conducted in the reading field and what we know about learning and

teaching has increased substantially. However, only a small percentage of teachers and administrators continue growing and learning. Only 10% of all English teachers belong to NCTE and only a small percentage read journals, attend conferences, or pursue graduate courses after they are permanently certified. In order for teaching to be regarded and recognized as a profession, those in the schools must keep growing and learning. They too must understand how students learn and must examine methods that have been accepted for years. Because they care about children, they must continue or begin to work toward change which activates children's intellects and stimulate learning.

WORKS CITED

Barr, R. (1972). The influence of instructional conditions on word recognition errors. Reading Research Quarterly, 7(3), 503-529.

Chall, J. S. (1967). Learning to read: The great debate. New York: McGraw-Hill.

DeFord, D. E. (1981). Literacy: Reading, writing and other essentials. Language Arts, 58(6), 652-659.

DeFord, D. E. (1985). Validating the construct of theoretical orientation in reading. Reading Research Quarterly, 20(3), 351-367.

Dunkin, M., & Biddle, B. (1974). The study of teaching. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.

Elder, R. C. (1971). Oral reading achievement of Scottish and American children. Elementary School Journal, 71, 216-230.

Goodman, K. (1986). What's whole in whole language. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Harste, J. C., & Burke, C. L. (1977). A new hypothesis for reading teacher research: Both the teaching and learning of reading is theoretically based. In P. D. Pearson (Ed.), Reading: Theory, research and practice (pp. 32-40). New York: Mason Publishing.

Kamil, M., & Peterson, P.D. (1979). Theory and practice in teaching reading. In A. Figurel (Ed.), Challenge and experience in reading. International Reading Conference Proceedings, 7, 151-153.

Moffett, J. (1985). Hidden impediments to improving English teaching. Phi Delta Kappan, 67, 50-56.

Smith, F. (1988). Understanding reading: A psycholinguistic analysis of reading and learning to read. (4th Ed.) New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Weaver, C. (1988). Reading process and practice: From sociopsycholinguistics to whole language. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Table 1

Philosophy of "Methods" Course Students
Based on TORP Analysis

| Student # | January philosophy | March philosophy |
|---|---|---|
| 9921 | phonics/skills | whole language/skills |
| 5749 | none | whole language |
| 7875 | none | whole language/skills |
| 5036 | skills/phonics | whole language/skills |
| 2496 | skills/phonics | whole language |
| 6627 | none | whole language/skills |
| 9982 | phonics/skills | none |
| 5459 | none | whole language |
| 9208 | none | whole language |
| 5518 | skills/phonics | whole language |
| 6470 | none | whole language |
| 4217 | phonics | whole language |
| 6875 | none | whole language/skills |
| 1046 | phonics/skills | whole language/skills |

Summary:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| No Definite Philosophy | 50% | 7% |
| Skills/Phonics | 43% | 0% |
| Phonics | 7% | 0% |
| Whole Language/Skills | 0% | 43% |
| Whole Language | 0% | 50% |

Table 2

Continuum of Instruction

| phonics | skills | whole language |
|---|---|---|
| (isolation of phonemes-- emphasis on decoding) | (isolation of skills-- emphasis on word recognition) | (no isolation of skills for practice-- emphasis on developing sense of story and text) |

Table 3

Philosophy of Field Students / Cooperating Teachers

Based on TORP Analysis

| Student # | March philosophy | May philosophy | Co-op philosophy |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | none | none | (not returned) |
| 2 | none | none | whole language |
| 3 | phonics/skills | phonics/skills | phonics/skills |
| 4 | whole language | whole language | none |
| 5 | whole language | whole language | phonics/skills |
| 6 | whole language | whole language | phonics/skills |
| 7 | none | none | none |
| 8 | none | none | none |
| 9 | none | none | none |
| 10 | none | none | whole language (TORP only) |
| 11 | none | whole language/ skills | none |
| 12 | phonics/skills | phonics/skills | phonics/skills |

Summary:

| | March | May | Co-op |
|---|---|---|---|
| No Definite Philosophy | 58% | 50% | 41% |
| Skills/Phonics | 17% | 17% | 33% |
| Phonics | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| Whole Language/Skills | 0% | 8% | 0% |
| Whole Language | 25% | 25% | 16% |